RESPECT AND CIVILITY IN THE WORKPLACE:
TEN TIPS

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1. PAY ATTENTION

A civil workplace is one where everyone's input is recognized, valued and where our attention is focused on the conversation at hand. If I am at a meeting, I should give it my undivided attention and be sure to turn off my cell phone or any other device that may distract me. If I expect a call or message during the meeting that I must take, then I should let the person running the meeting know ahead of time so that I can excuse myself with minimal disruption. Likewise, if I'm going to be late for a meeting, I need to let the organizer know and apologize in advance.

It all comes down to basic respect. If I make someone feel that I cannot be bothered to give them my full attention, I have implied to them that what they have to say is not important to me. Such behaviour could cast me as a co-worker who is thoughtless and disrespectful, which is likely not my intention.

2. SAY THE MAGIC WORDS

Our parents were the first to remind us about the importance of saying those magic words which are true to any culture:

Please…Thank you…Excuse me…I'm sorry. They cost nothing to say and yet are the building blocks of a civil society. I can contribute to a respectful workplace when I express my appreciation to co-workers for their help, avoid interrupting others when they are speaking, and sincerely apologize when I mistakenly offend someone. By being recognized as a respectful and civil person at work, I build greater social capital and trust.

3. ACKNOWLEDGE OTHERS

A common example of workplace incivility is the failure to observe the common niceties prevalent in our Western culture. It can send a clear signal that something is wrong with the work environment when co-workers do not even say hello to each other. Courtesy is contagious, just like a smile. I can catch it through proactive behaviours. If I pass a colleague in the hall or on the street and I remember to say "Hello," it is almost guaranteed that I will get the courtesy returned. It costs absolutely nothing yet pays high dividends.

4. THINK ABOUT DELICATE ITEMS BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Occasional laughter plays a great role in making the workplace more satisfying and helps improve employee morale. However, humour takes many forms and not all of them are appreciated by everyone or even appropriate for the workplace. If I'm tempted to make a joke or want to say something I think is funny, I should take the time to pause and consider my audience. Asking myself, if the joke is at someone else's expense? Could it embarrass or demean someone? If I can answer "Yes," then I know that it is best left unsaid, no matter what the circumstances.

5. ADDRESSING PEOPLE CORRECTLY

It is important to call co-workers by their first names or properly address them as "Mrs.," "Ms." or "Mr." depending on how they would like to be addressed. Refrain for referring to anyone at work as "My Dear" or "Honey" if they are not a close friend or relative as you never know how that could make someone feel. Likewise, avoid assigning people nicknames or pet names as that can be seen as belittling and patronizing.

6. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

A respectful workplace includes self-respect. As an asset to the company we work for, we need to invest the time to take care of ourselves and put our best foot forward. Showing up at work untidy or dishevelled, sends the wrong message to others and essentially says that we can't be bothered to take care of ourselves. This may give a false impression of our work ethic and send an unintended message to others that we are not here to do our best work.

An "I don't care" attitude in the workplace can be discouraging to those around us. Just like a smile, it can spread but in the wrong direction. Exhibiting self-respect through how we show up to others each day shows them that we care and are committed to do our best work. We are not just setting the tone we are strengthening it and building trust.

7. DON'T REACT. RESPOND!

We all have our triggers, those little things other people do that frustrate or anger us. Chances are our co-workers are aware of our triggers as well. By learning to recognize our own triggers and developing strategies to manage our reactions, we can respond appropriately. We can choose to steer clear of situations that we are not directly involved in to avoid unnecessary anger and frustration. However, difficult situations are sometimes unavoidable, in which case it is important to make a point of listening to respond vs. reacting too quickly. This approach helps to contain emotional reactions that could just make the situation worse. By being self-aware to our own responses, we are able to manage difficult situations with emotional maturity and civility.

8. BE INCLUSIVE

It's natural to associate with a small group of like-minded people at work. However, some co-workers may be left out of the social dynamic simply because they are not good at making friendships and "small talk." Looking for opportunities to include others that we may not generally socialize with by acknowledging their birthday, inviting them to lunch or asking for their input on projects can go a long way to cultivating civility. Everyone wants to be recognized and have a sense of belonging. It is very rewarding to bridge social barriers to discover new associates and colleagues.

9. THE POWER OF HUMILITY

Never shy away from giving others credit when they do a good job. This does not take away the importance of positioning your own contributions. Rather, it develops a reputation for generosity, inclusiveness and allows others to recognize everyone's good work, including your own. Good work often speaks for itself and there is no need to push others to recognize it in a forceful manner. Humility helps build a reputation that allows people to be agile, productive and respected in organizations. It builds respectful and trustful relationships which are key to success.

10. DON'T ALLOW OTHERS TO COMPROMISE WORKPLACE CIVILITY

As important as it is for us to demonstrate the behaviour we expect from others, it is equally important for us to address situations that work against civility in the workplace. If we hear people whispering, gossiping or telling off-colour jokes we need to address it. Having invested in building a civil workplace, we need to be committed to protecting the progress and environment that others have worked hard to create. All of us have a role in making sure that everyone feels comfortable at work. Let's take pride in having an environment in which everyone feels comfortable working in each and every day.